

Education Re-Imagined:

12 Actions for Education



Foreword

The world is not short of efforts to imagine, or even will into existence new futures for public education. Corporations and technology companies try to persuade and even scare us into believing that schools are broken, teachers are stuck in their ways, and an outdated industrial model of education is boring our students rigid. The future, they tell us, is digital. Students won't need teachers so much because they can look things up for themselves, and virtual learning will be the pathway to innovation and student engagement.

Teacher unions, meanwhile, have sometimes been too inclined to claim that teachers are just fine, we should mainly trust them to get on with the job for which they are qualified, but because their workload is increasing and the challenges are getting harder, we should give them more resources to do it. More teachers, smaller class sizes, better pay, and less testing – this is a second common scenario for educational reform.

This report does not merely sit between these extremes. It goes above and beyond them by bringing public as well as professional voices into the debate about the future of our children's education, and the education of our children for that future. And the results are salutary. For one thing, parents and the public still want what they have always wanted – teachers who can help their children to read and write and count well, and to become human beings with strong values and good character. They don't want teachers to be reduced solely to facilitators. They don't want children to be inspired by algorithms. They want





teachers who can teach, educate, and lead their children into becoming informed and engaged citizens.

The report also draws attention to what is changing and should change in the future of teaching and learning. Classrooms will not be the only place where children learn, and class sizes no longer the unit for bargaining for resources. With and without technology, new kinds of learning spaces for young people are evolving as schools get to grips with the diversity of their students and other adults are working alongside teachers to support all students' needs in more flexible ways. Students want and need more of a say in their own learning and how schools are run, and teachers will sometimes need to step to one side to help them do that. Professional development will remain a priority but need to align with proven effective practice so that it is not mainly a way to indulge new fashions or implement government strategies, but to help teachers learn with other teachers within and across their own schools, so they can teach and reach all their students effectively.

There's nothing outrageously innovative in this report. The public and professionals don't want to put an end to schools as we know them, turn our schools into glorified offices, or imagine that the answer to all our educational problems exists in digital tablets or other devices. They want teachers to continue to be the responsible adults who can help their children develop strong values, master fundamental skills, and become better citizens and fulfilled workers. Professionals especially also understand that schools need more capacity to be able to draw on a wider range of adults to respond to children from all kinds of backgrounds and with all sorts of needs. The world is changing. Teaching is changing. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation understands that but also sees that the things we have always valued in our best teachers – stepping forward to lead and guide our young learners – must also be sustained. Along with directions being set by the government of Saskatchewan, this evidence-informed report is an important contribution to the future of education in Saskatchewan and therefore to the future of the province itself.

Andy Hargreaves

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In Support of Education Re-Imagined

“Much has changed in our education system over the past few years, some of which has not been to the benefit of our students. Hopefully the actions in the report, when acted upon, will improve all aspects of our educational system for the benefit of everyone involved in and impacted by negative events of the past.”

Dr. Earl Cook

Minister of Education, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan

Who We Are

The community-based organizations and Indigenous sovereign nations that guided this work care deeply about education and are determined to ensure that the students of Saskatchewan receive a high-quality education today as well as in the future. We thank the following for their time and contributions:

Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation

Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations

Inclusion Saskatchewan

John Howard Society of Saskatchewan

Métis Nation - Saskatchewan

Northlands College

OUTSaskatoon

Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry

Saskatchewan Alliance for Youth and Community Well-Being

Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission

Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

Saskatchewan Health Authority

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation

Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association

Saskatoon Open Door Society

Trans Umbrella Foundation

University of Regina

University of Saskatchewan

We are proud to present the findings of this Re-Imagine Education initiative. We hope you will join with us in advocating for the implementation of these **12 Actions for Education**, ensuring a bright future for our students, our families, our communities and our province.

"As education gets re-invented and re-imagined, so does business, so do communities, so do families."

Monica Krueger

1st Vice-Chair, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

"I was honoured to be involved in the Re-Imagine Education project and frankly I was inspired by the genuine interest in getting opinions on where we as parents, students and teachers would like education to take our children over the next decade."

Catherine Weenk

Parent and former Co-Chair, School Community Council, Saskatoon Public School Board

What We Imagine

Imagine, for a moment, a student starting Grade 2. Maybe it is your child. Maybe it is your grandchild or that little person down the street whom you often see riding their bike up and down the sidewalk in front of your home.

When we imagine what the Saskatchewan education system will look like 10 years from now we imagine the education journey ahead of this child. We are also imagining the future of our community as this child grows into a contributing member of that community.

Seven-year-olds in Grade 2 are typically not interested in funding models or standardized tests, curriculum renewal or legislative limits on class size. What they do care about is going to a school where they are safe and cared for and where they can have fun, learn new things, make friends and

satisfy their innate curiosity for the world around them.

Over the past 10 months, we heard about the importance of such things as educational resources and school division policy. What surprised us is that we also heard that, fundamentally, parents, students and teachers envision the same kind of school as our imaginary student.

How do we, as a society, ensure that children and youth have the educational experience that they envision and deserve?

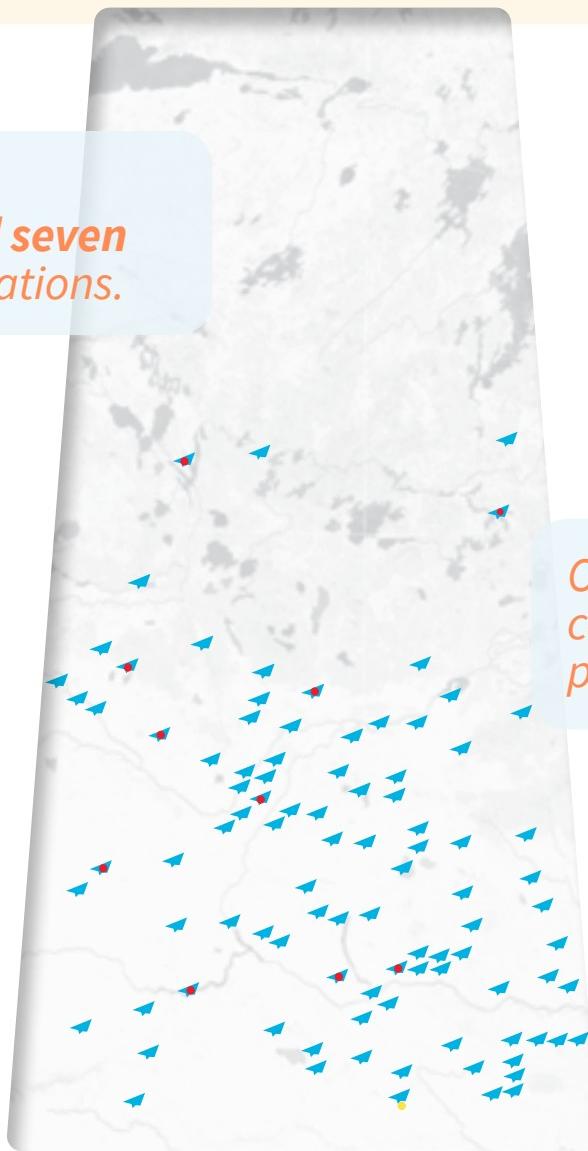
How can we ensure that our decisions and systems provide safe and rich learning environments for our children and youth? How do we strip away the noise and focus on what really matters?

In short, how do we Re-Imagine Education?



*Education is vital to the future of our province.
It affects everything and everyone.*

**204 schools, 69
community and seven
student consultations.**



**Over 6000 people
contributed to the
public survey**

*The decisions we make about education today
will change the way we experience our lives tomorrow.*

The Invitation

The time has come to begin redefining a vision for the evolution of public education in our province.

Re-Imagine Education invited parents, grandparents, caregivers, students, members of the business community and post-secondary institutions, members of the public and teachers to share their hopes and dreams for public education now and in the future.

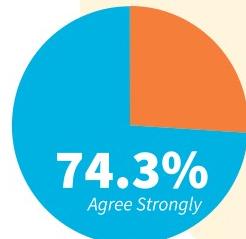
The public's voice, through Re-Imagine Education, is calling for a refresh or a reset of the public education system across Saskatchewan.

Consultations were held in schools, libraries, community halls and event centres, hockey rinks and coffee shops across the province. The conversations were passionate and engaging. People care deeply about public education and the future of Saskatchewan children.

Without a question, when asked to envision the future of education, people in Saskatchewan have a lot to say.

We learned there is much to celebrate in the public education system. Stories of engaged students,

Everyone benefits from having an educated population



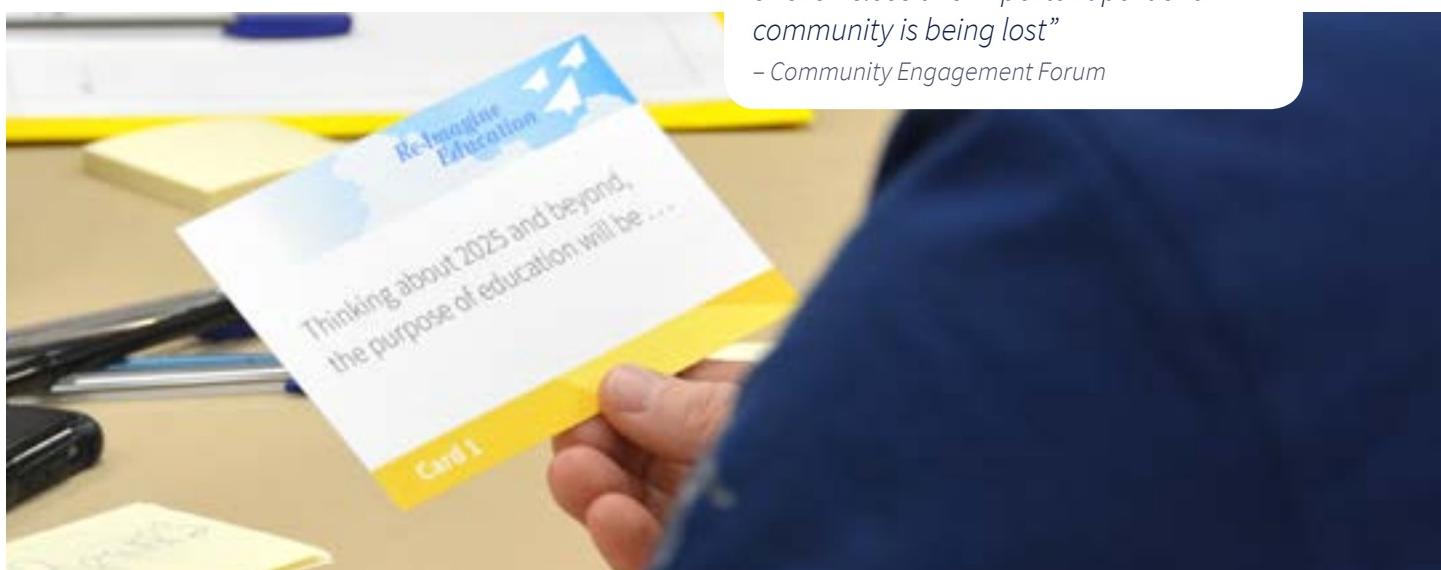
caring and passionate teachers, supportive parents and innovative teaching and learning ran through the data.

Most notably, we heard that education matters. That people are passionate about their children and grandchildren's futures and that they

want to be involved. We were encouraged to be bold, to ask the difficult questions and to make recommendations that were actionable, that would have real impact in the classroom today and would help to secure a bright future for Saskatchewan children and youth.

"Schools are the backbone of many communities. This is where the children spend their day, it is often part of the community's identity in the province. I feel that as rural schools get smaller or even close this important part of a community is being lost"

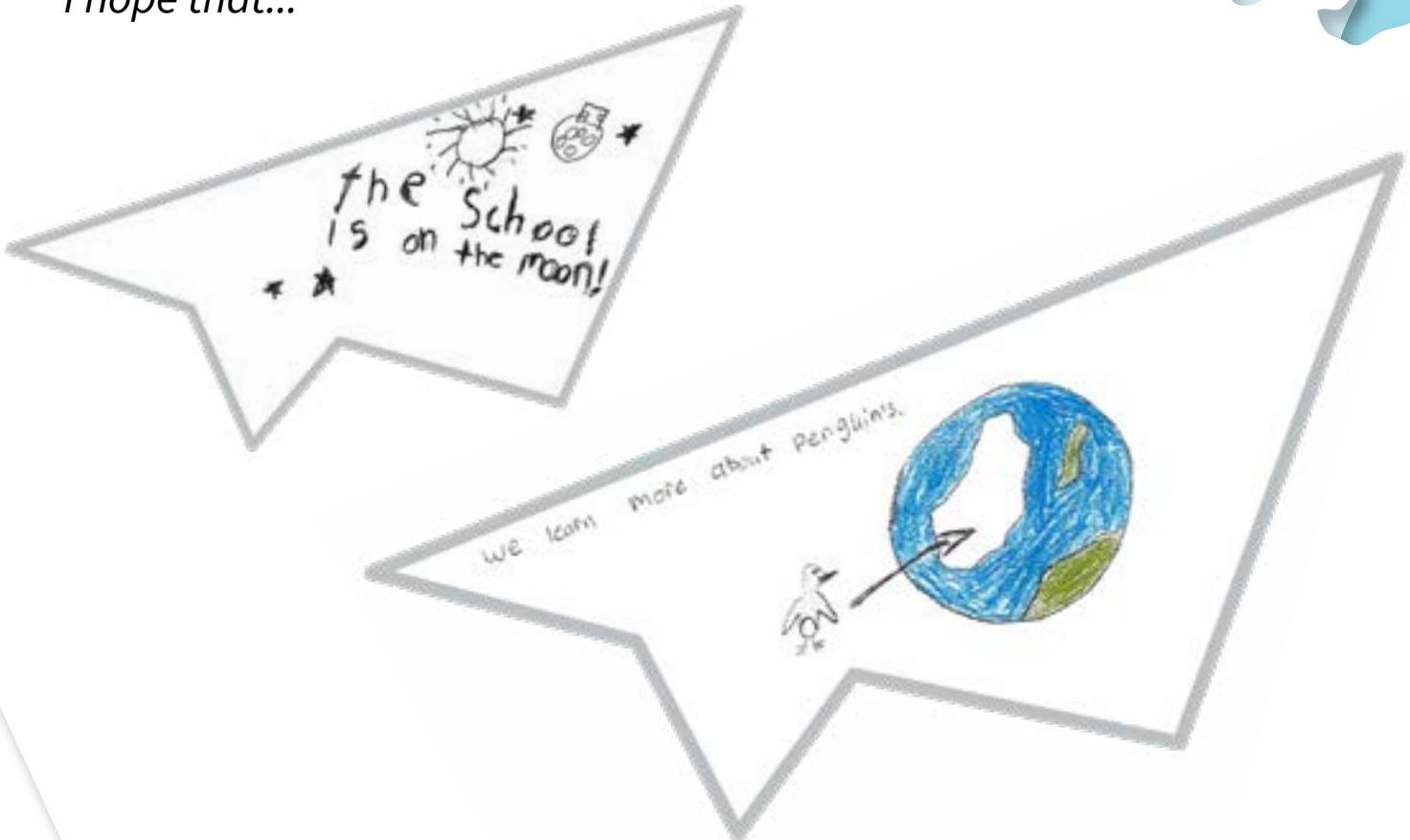
– Community Engagement Forum



Vision for Education

Re-Imagine Education invited the Saskatchewan public to share their blue sky vision for education beyond 2020.

*As I Re-Imagine Education for
Saskatchewan,
I hope that...*



The Saskatchewan public envision education as an all-important process valuing people and positive relationships. A child's educational experience nurtures their unique gifts and talents and ensures learning spaces that are inclusive, responsive and, most importantly, safe.

Purpose of Education and An Educated Person

The purpose of education is twofold.

- People value the development of skills in a number of subject areas, including reading, writing and math.
- Education has an important role in developing socially aware critical thinkers and lifelong learners who are compassionate and respectful and who appreciate diversity.

“The purpose of education should be raising good citizens, individuals who could be responsible, honest, strong, polite, informed, and caring.”

– Community Engagement Forum

“Educational purposes has not changed since the main goal is to train citizens to create better institutions and live a better life.”

– Community Engagement Forum

In the public’s eye, the purpose of education has not changed substantially over the years, nor has the definition of an educated person. Creating well-rounded, capable and literate individuals who meaningfully engage with their communities and society is as important today as it was in the past.

The public has high expectations and wants to be confident that education is fulfilling all of these purposes. Teachers are highly valued by the public as trained professionals with the necessary skills, abilities and professional judgment to guide students in fulfilling their potential.

When asked about the main purpose of education, the public identified these six priorities:

- Learning to read and express ourselves well
- Learning to problem-solve
- Learning how to work with numbers
- Learning things useful in the world of work or entrepreneurship
- Learning values
- Learning how to be good citizens

Being Bold

*As I Re-Imagine Education for Saskatchewan, I hope that ...
“It gets shaken up. Let’s be brave, Saskatchewan.”*
– School Engagement Forum

Throughout the data, four main themes emerged as areas of focus:

The Learning Environment

Decision Making in Education

Legislation and Policy in Education

Education Funding

Recommendations for action in these four key areas can move us towards the system of public education the people of Saskatchewan envision and deserve.

The Learning Environment

Recommendations

1. *Learning spaces must be resourced so that teachers can create a safe and effective learning environment for the diversity of student learning.*

2. *Human resources must be provided to support inclusion and create classrooms where every child can learn. This means providing educational assistances, Elders, speech-language pathologists, educational psychologists, counsellors, librarians, English as an additional language teachers and others to support classroom learning.*

3. *Move beyond test scores. Establish structures and processes to cultivate a sense of shared accountability among government, teachers, parents and community members for student success at all stages of their educational experience.*

An overwhelming theme was the idea that the learning environment is different today than it was in the past.

Shifting societal realities and expectations see schools taking on increasing roles in students' lives that may have previously resided with families or other groups.

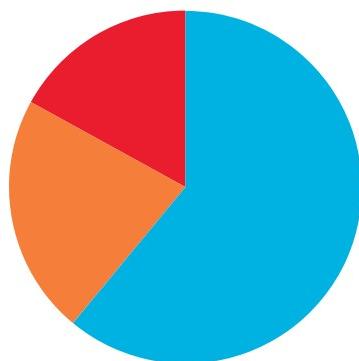
The data showed significant public trust in teachers and in their ability to make the best decisions to guide children's learning and meet their needs. The public has high expectations for both the system and its teachers and has confidence in the classroom teacher to meet these expectations.

Class sizes are growing, student needs are increasingly complex and both recent and ongoing societal changes are affecting children and the classroom in new and challenging ways. Administrative demands on the teachers' time, such as testing and reporting, are increasing

and the resources that would help to address this intensification have diminished.

Participants were clear that they support an inclusive education system where all students are given the opportunity to learn and develop their individual gifts. They were also clear that an inclusive education system requires the proper resources to help students succeed.

The data reflected a need to ensure classrooms and schools are a safe and nurturing environment for all students. Parents in particular are seeking reassurance that their children and youth are safe, encouraged and in environments that ensure that they learn to their full potential.



61.2%

of respondents agreed
**teachers are in the best position
to choose the methods they use
to guide student learning**

Education must “provide a safe space for people of all backgrounds/abilities to interact.”

– Community Engagement Forum

“Indigenous students need to see themselves in every aspect of the learning environment from teachers, administrators, senior level administrators to relevant curriculum, contemporary resources, culturally appropriate policies and practices.”

– Public Online Survey

Characteristics of a healthy and safe learning environment:

- Focus on the teaching and learning relationship
- Invites a love of learning
- Smaller class size
- Family involvement
- Community support (Elders, Knowledge Keepers)
- Differentiated Instruction
- Learning supports, including qualified educational assistants to address student needs
- English as an additional language supports
- Mental health supports, e.g., counsellors
- Minimized standardized tests and increased teacher decision making about student progress
- Reflective of the community

Part of the equation is time.

Teachers and students need time to build strong and trusting relationships. Participants are aware of increasing demands on teachers' time in today's classroom and are optimistic for practices and resources that can make the classroom a safer and more nurturing environment in the future.

The Learning Environment Re-Imagined:

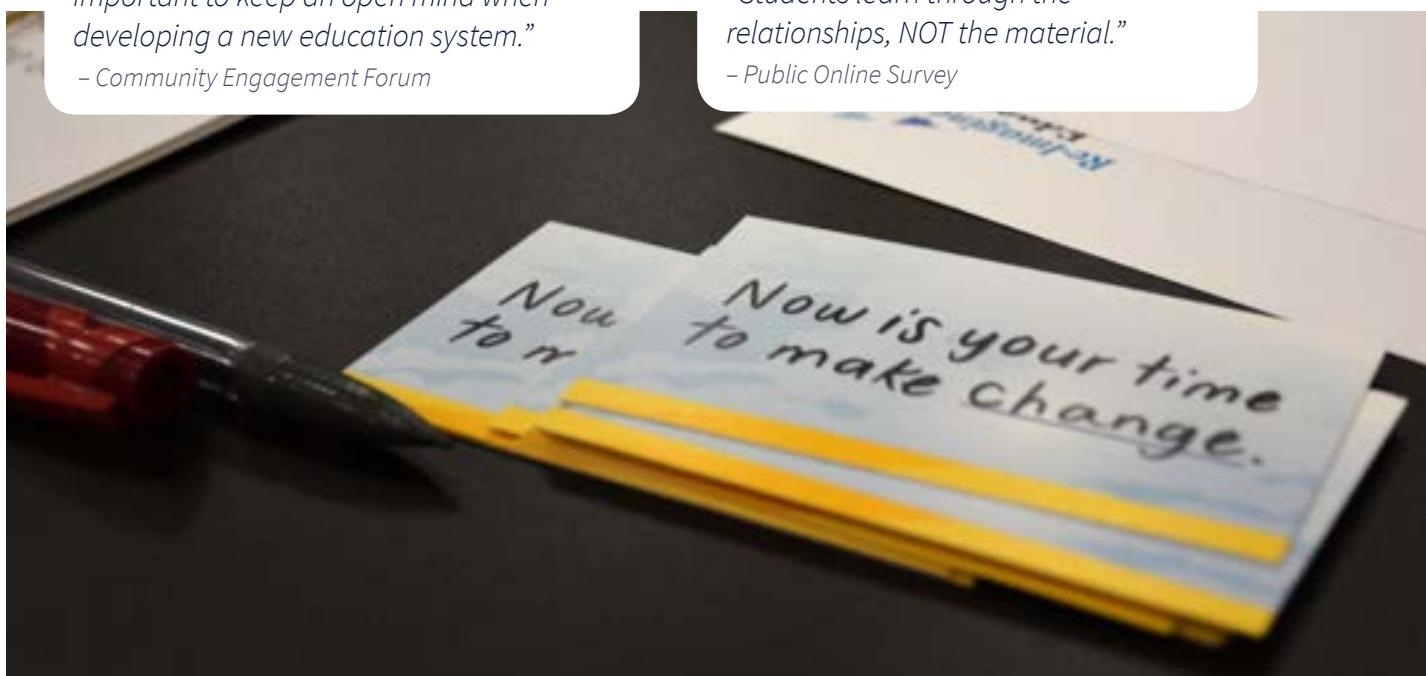
- Focuses on students' gifts
- Respectful
- Variety of course options
- Access to professional supports
- Strong standards
- Uses current technology
- Access to community resources
- Has flexible learning spaces
- Access to diverse range of activities
- Honours and supports diversity

"It is important to remember that education is always changing. New discoveries and innovation lead these education changes ... I think it is important to keep an open mind when developing a new education system."

– Community Engagement Forum

"Students learn through the relationships, NOT the material."

– Public Online Survey



Decision Making in Education

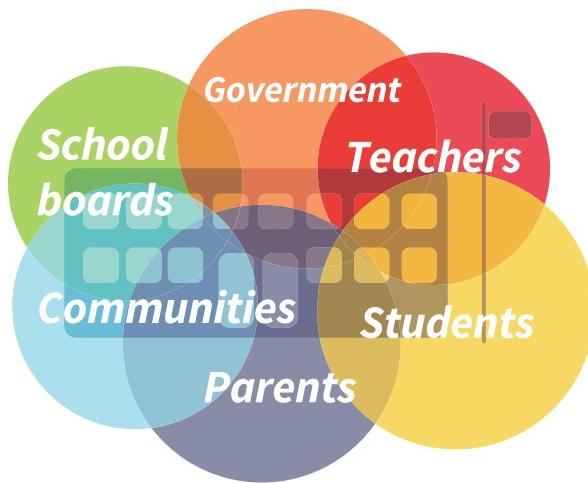
Recommendations

4. *Restructure authority and agency to the local school community to ensure local voice at the school community level.*

5. *School facilities serve as the hub and gathering place of the local community, providing space for community programming.*

6. *To ensure ongoing and sustained input into all aspects of education in Saskatchewan, establish a Provincial Council on Education that is free of politics to ensure that education programs, services and policies are aligned with research and best practices.*

The public is calling for opportunities for their voices and opinions to be heard on matters that affect their children and their children's education.



Schools are the hub of the community. Participants told us that the school is the ideal place to support students' diverse needs. Schools should be a centralized point that can deliver a wide range of services and programs. Participants told us that the school building is an important place to gather and build community. It was also recognized that communities can also provide learning opportunities for students outside of the classroom.

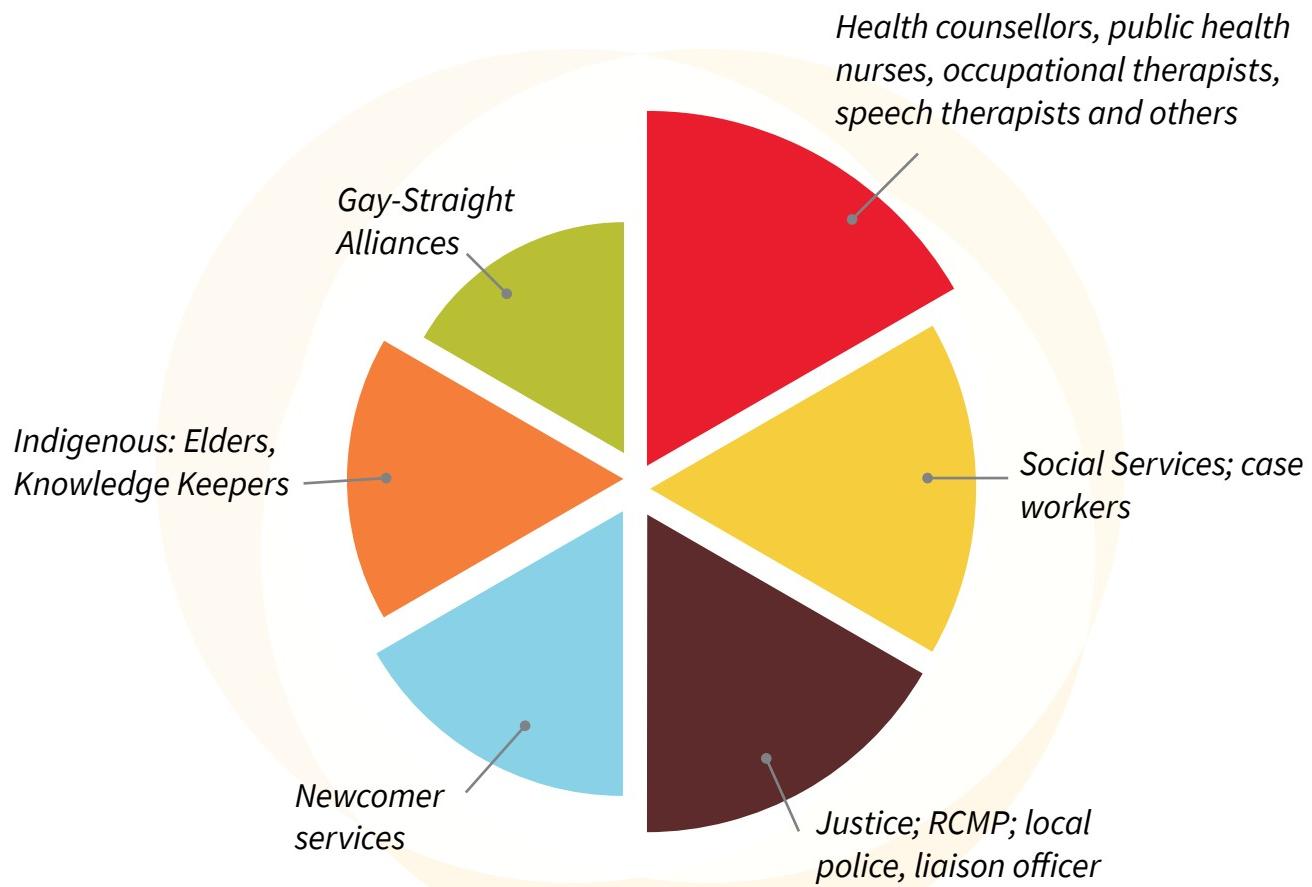
Community members overwhelmingly shared a desire to support their children and youth. They see schools as important centres where the community can gather, provide activities and build relationships. However, they recognized that schools should be open spaces for the community without further extending expectations on teachers or the school.

Finally, the data reflected a clear desire for ongoing and meaningful conversations about education within communities. The public is calling for opportunities for their voices and opinions to be heard on matters that affect their children and their children's education.

One thing that emerged from the consultations, public engagements and the survey is that the people of Saskatchewan want education decisions to be made in the best interests of our children and youth.

Participants were clear that education is a shared responsibility. Government, school boards, teachers, students, parents and communities each have a role to play in making decisions and in supporting education. ***When these parties are involved and empowered real accountability is possible and decisions are transparent and visibly centred on student learning.***

Saskatchewan people want to see these services in their schools:



“When my daughter is in school I want to be welcomed into the school. I don’t want her to feel that she isn’t good enough or that I’m not good enough to be in there because of my background.”

– Student Consultation

“To have a strong relationship between the school and the community, both have a role to play. The school needs to be open to its community’s reality and work towards its development and the school should be the focal point of community responses. For the community, it needs to be present and visible in the school. Parents must build relationships with the school staff and support them.”

– Community Engagement Forum

“Everything works better when we all work together. A school is often the center of a community & should be valued & respected as an important place & and integral part of the community.”

– School Engagement Forum

“Ideally the school will be the hub of a community wheel with many spokes including things like health care, social services, cultural groups, sporting/club organizations amongst others. As this hub school and their staffs will play an important role of identifying needs and making both sides aware of opportunities available or people in need of assistance.”

– Community Engagement Forum

Legislation and Policy in Education

Recommendations

7.

The school program, including curriculum development, must be updated continually, utilizing teachers' professional knowledge in all phases and providing opportunities for input from parents, students and community members.

8.

The Ministry of Education must provide a full range of resources and materials as well as teacher-led professional development opportunities to support curriculum implementation for classroom teachers.

9.

School division policies must be developed in collaboration with school staff, parents and students so that the outcomes meet the needs of the community.

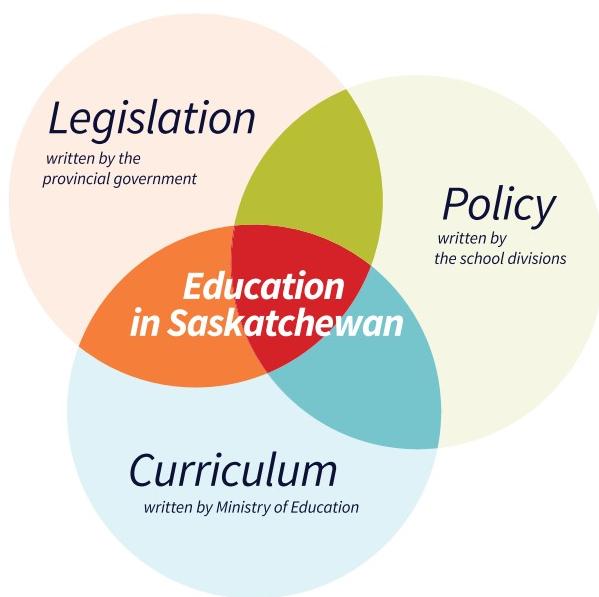
“The school curriculum should include courses that help prepare students for real-life challenges.”

– Community Engagement Forum

“Back to basics and make the report card simple and clear so parents can see exactly how their child is doing in each subject.”

– School Engagement Forum

Education in Saskatchewan operates within a system of rules and expectations as laid out in legislation, policy and curriculum documents. Teachers are required to teach the curriculum and to report on how students are meeting the outcomes stated in curriculum documents.



Re-Imagine Education participants said that education should set high standards and that consistency is important. They also said that flexibility and adaptation is necessary to create an education system that responds to the needs of every community and for every student.

To truly Re-Imagine Education we must be willing to rethink even the basic structures such as traditional classrooms, age-alike groupings, five-day school weeks and 50-minute classes.

Another major theme that emerged was around input and transparency. Parents, teachers and students want to be involved in making decisions that directly affect education. Students in particular expressed interest in having input into decisions.

Increased transparency and involvement provides an opportunity for conversations around issues where there is a diversity of opinion, such as:

- Failing students*
- Late assignments*
- Report cards, and*
- Math curriculum*

The Re-Imagine data tells us that there is a need for further dialogue within school communities about local policies that influence student learning and success.

Curriculum, in particular, received a lot of attention, with comments suggesting that curriculum needs to be relevant to students and that the current curriculum is not keeping pace with broader societal changes. The data reflected a need not only for relevant curriculum but also for a process that ensures that the curriculum is manageable.

At the same time, participants spoke of the need to support curriculum with learning resources and professional development for teachers.

Education Funding

Recommendations

10. *Conduct a comprehensive study to determine the real costs of a quality education system fit for the 21st century and commit to a long-term funding mechanism to ensure students receive quality education.*

11. *Any funding model must be designed to provide the resources to support the varied needs of students, including behavioural issues, learning needs, cultural diversity and mental health.*

Participants in the Re-Imagine Education initiative stated clearly and often that education funding is important. They also said that the current methods and levels of funding are not enough to meet the needs of students today, let alone the future.

The people of Saskatchewan envision education as an investment. A strong education system creates educated and productive citizens. The public understands that by investing in education we realize savings in other areas such as health, justice and social services.

Participants talked about the need for funding to be predictable and stable so that school divisions can make decisions in the best interests of teaching and learning. ***Without question, funding decisions should not be political but rather be driven by the needs of students.***

We heard that students flourish when the education system, families and communities work together. Our children and youth require

a system that is outside the political rhetoric. To thrive, students need a stable, sustainable and transparent system from Pre-K through to Grade 12.

As a province, we need to shift the conversation from what does education cost, to what investments are required for each child to receive the education that they deserve. A funding model, based upon grassroots analysis of the real costs, could ensure long-term, sustainable and depoliticized funding for education in Saskatchewan.

Many participants had ideas and suggestions about how money should be spent or where money should be directed. More adults in classrooms and mental health supports were two examples of supports that were mentioned repeatedly as critical to ensuring a healthy education system. However, participants also expressed concern about one-time cash investments that are not sustainable and often can do more harm than good.

"The public has the responsibility to demand that more than just adequate resources are available for public education. The government must fund this."

- Community Engagement Forum

"We need to fund our education system appropriately ... we either fund students during their PreK-12 education now ... or we fund increased incarceration, reliance on social/welfare, etc."

- Public Online Survey

"Stop cutting funding for education! Stop taking teachers out of classrooms, cutting support staff and bring back guidance counselling for these kids!!"

- Public Online Survey

"Education is an investment. It can't be at the mercy of the economy's rise and falls."

- Community Engagement Forum

What We Have Learned

Recommendation

12.

The Actions for Education outlined in this report must be acted upon. We are all accountable. Government policy-makers and traditional leaders, parents, community groups and the public share the responsibility of ensuring that conversations about the future of education continue and that decision makers are held accountable.

We have learned...

- ... People in the province care deeply about education.
- ... That people genuinely trust and believe in their schools and have high expectations for teachers and for students.
- ... That the system is not broken but that we need to be bold in making decisions now to ensure a successful future for our province and for our children.

We have learned that people want to continue to talk about the future of education and this initiative is the beginning of the conversation.

“I believe, and have believed for a while, that education needs a complete overhaul. It should look less like rows and columns, and more like a creative space for young people to develop ideas, challenge themselves, and gain knowledge that is interlinked across the core subjects.”

- School Engagement

Afterword

Re-Imagine Education is an impressive piece of policy-making. It's not just the ideas that are forward-looking, but the way it connects ideas and process.

First, there is the breadth of project, which involved several phases. Each one was targeted at a different group, from individuals to schools to community-based organizations who were often excluded from past policy discussions, such as the John Howard Society or the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. This process was **inclusive** in the best sense of the word.

But breadth is not necessarily depth, which draws attention to a second feature of the process: **dialogue**. The process encouraged real exchanges within and between these groups, and on some very basic questions.

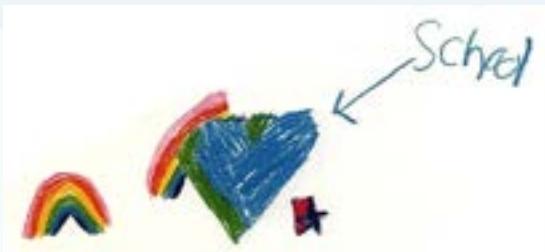
Re-Imagine Education asks us to look at reform differently. Certainly, it recognizes government's vital role in education, but it has as much to say about the role of the community at large, which highlights a third feature of the approach: **ownership**. A rich dialogue like this one not only sifts through the finer points of the issues, it uncovers the deep interconnections between them, such as the links between culture and learning; and this, in turn, reveals the complexity of the task that lies ahead.

The community has a critical role to play. Ownership implies responsibility and action. This not only produces a better school system, it creates **resilience** – a collective will to face and overcome the obstacles to progress and to see the project through to completion.

As the project moves into its next phase, there is every reason to be hopeful that Saskatchewanians will rise to the challenge. In the coming decades, systems like this one must be rebuilt and revitalized from the bottom up, not the top down. That way lies the future.

Dr. Don Lenihan, President and CEO of Middle Ground Policy Research

www.middlegroundengagement.com



“

All students receive the best education with all supports and funding they need to be successful.

”



“

students feel empowered and prepared to take on the world.

”



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